

Claims:

1           1. An apparatus for selecting one of a plurality of  
2 service providers which are available to a computer system  
3 for connection to a network, the apparatus comprising:

4           at least one database containing data regarding various  
5 parameters of the plurality of service providers and service  
6 quality requirements for various service types;

7           a decision making unit connected to said at least one  
8 database for selecting one of said plurality of service  
9 providers, said selecting being made according to decision  
10 making criteria and data from said at least one database.

11           2. The apparatus according to claim 1, further  
12 comprising an interface unit for displaying to a user the  
13 selected data provider.

14           3. The apparatus according to claim 1, further  
15 comprising an implementation agent for connecting said  
16 computer system to said selected provider.

17           4. The apparatus according to claim 1, further  
18 providing a tracking unit for updating data in said at least  
19 one database based on current conditions in said service  
20 providers.

1           5. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said  
2 decision making unit includes a criteria unit for providing  
3 different criteria related to different selection parameters  
4 and a decision making agent unit for making the decision  
5 based on criteria from said criteria unit.

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1           6. The apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said  
2 decision making unit further includes a logic unit for  
3 providing logic based on different decision criteria to said  
4 decision making agent unit.

1           7. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said at  
2 least one database includes a first database for storing  
3 preconfigured service quality requirements of each normal  
4 service type and a second database for storing parameters  
5 regarding each provider, including billing data, selection  
6 priority data, resource condition data and resource basic  
7 information data.

1           8. A method of selecting one of a plurality of service  
2 providers for connecting a computer system to a network,  
3 said method comprising:

4           storing data in at least one database regarding  
5 parameters of each service provider and service quality  
6 requirements;

7           retrieving data from said at least one database;

8 selecting specific criteria for making a decision; and  
9 selecting one of said plurality of providers based on  
10 data from said at least one database and based on said  
11 criteria.

1 9. The method according to claim 8, further  
2 comprising:

3 providing logic based on different decision criteria so  
4 that said selecting is also based on said logic.

5 10. The method according to claim 8, further  
6 comprising displaying said selected provider to a user for  
7 approval.

8 11. The method according to claim 10, further  
9 comprising automatically connecting said computer system to  
10 said selected provider.

1 12. The method according to claim 8, further  
2 comprising:

3 updating said at least one database based on the real  
4 time state of each provider.

5 13. The method according to claim 8, wherein said at  
6 least one database includes a first database for storing  
7 preconfigured service quality requirements for each normal  
8 service type and a second database for storing resource

5 data concerning each provider, including billing policies,  
6 selection priorities, resource condition data and resource  
7 basic information.

1 14. A computer network system comprising:  
2 a computer network;  
3 a series of pathways to said network controlled by  
4 service providers;  
5 a computer system selectively connected to said  
6 pathways;  
7 a selection device for selecting which service provider  
8 should be utilized when connecting the computer system to  
9 the network, said selection device including at least one  
10 database storing data regarding various parameters about  
11 said service providers and service quality requirements and  
12 a decision making unit for making said selection based on  
13 said data stored in said at least one database and on  
14 decision making criteria.

1 15. A networked communication system comprising:  
2 a network arrangement;  
3 a plurality of terminals communicating with said  
4 network;  
5 service providers maintaining access to said network  
6 from said terminals;  
7 a server containing data regarding charging  
8 information of said service providers;

9 said server being accessible by said terminals so as to  
10 obtain said charging information, said terminals selecting a  
11 service provider based on said charging information.

1 16. The system according to claim 15, wherein said  
2 service providers are application service provider services.

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3 17. The system according to claim 16, wherein said  
4 network is the internet and said service providers are  
5 internet service provider services.

1 18. A system for selecting one of a plurality of  
2 service providers for connecting a computer system to a  
3 network, comprising:

4 means for storing data in at least one database  
5 regarding parameters of each service provider and service  
6 quality requirement;

7 means for retrieving data from said at least one  
8 database;

9 means for selecting specific criteria for making a  
10 decision; and

11 means for selecting one of said plurality of providers  
12 based on data from said at least one database and based on  
13 said criteria.